

March 5, 2022

Dear Co-Chairs Cohen and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Slap and Palm, Ranking Members Miner and Harding, and members of the Environment Committee:

We are writing to ask you to support Raised House Bill 5291, An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways and Recreational Trails.

This important bill would increase the bond authorization for the Recreational Trails and Greenways Grants program to \$6 million. As you may be aware, in Fall, 2021, DEEP issued a request for recreational trails proposals with only \$3 million available and received 65 applications requesting over \$22 million. The \$3 million was granted to twenty worthy projects, but another \$7 million in highly ranked proposals were unable to be funded, and we know the ongoing need for investments in Connecticut's outdoor recreation infrastructure will continue.

We are daily users of Connecticut's Bikeways, Greenways, and Recreational Trails to maintain our health in our senior years. We bear witness to the amazing increase in usage of the trails for safe outdoor recreation in these times of Covid-19. We are active members of several groups such as the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, East Coast Greenway Council, and the Twelve Town Air Line Trail Master Plan Committee, that support our local trails. We also seek out recreational trails as part of travelling, often seeking out trails to be the focus of our vacation plans and tourism dollars. We have become aware of how other states and Canadian provinces have taken an aggressive, targeted approach to trail development, leveraging high quality trail experiences into economic opportunities at the individual, community, and regional level.

Connecticut has done amazing things with our trails and greenways, but from what we see elsewhere, we are still substantially behind in closing gaps and linking trails together, providing consistent wayfinding signage on site and online, and weaving together disparate resources to provide comprehensive trail user experiences across our state.

In our neck of the woods, the Quiet Corner, we hope that an increase in this competitive funding would encourage future proposals such as:

- Better gate/trail crossing designs (and implementation) to better comply with ADA requirements.
- Multi-lingual and braille signage at kiosks and crossings.
- Specialized sections of the trails that feature such things as Storywalks to promote literacy , GRACE Trails to promote mental health, railroad history markers, Certified Distance markers for runners, and end to end mileposts.
- Better hiker/biker on demand tents sites and shelters in conjunction with existing state facilities for through travelers.
- Establishment of a regional cooperative trained volunteer crew to coordinate annual and emergency maintenance, such as clearing drainage ditches, removing downed trees and trailside mowing.
- Critical resurfacing projects such as Potter Road, to South Brook Road, Hampton (aka, the "Hampton Hole") and in the areas of Sand Dam Road and Lowell-Davies Road, Thompson both of which for over 5 years have been travel bottlenecks, the former between Willimantic and the Goodwin Forest Education Center in Hampton and the latter between, Thompson and the city of Putnam.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this matter.

Sincerely,

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